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ABSTRACT

Noting that most mainstream primary teachers have received little or no training focusing on working with the growing number of students who speak English as a second language, this booklet equips primary teachers with basic information regarding the instruction of children who speak English as a second language (ESL). The booklet identifies ten basic strategies for teachers, including finding out important information about the student's cultural, linguistic, and family background that may be helpful; learning essential communication words in the child's first language; using games and activities to help the ESL student interact with the class in a non-threatening manner; and developing a quiet place in the classroom where ESL students can have time alone. The booklet also includes strategies for working with families. The booklet includes contact information for assessment tools, references, suggested readings, a glossary, and a legislation appendix. (HTH)

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Welcoming a Student Who Does Not Speak English

Pre-Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade

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If you are like most mainstream primary teachers, you received little or no training that focused on working with the growing number of students who speak English as a second language. While you may not have encountered students from this population in your classroom yet, it is likely that you will very soon. You then will be facing the challenge of how to effectively teach and communicate with a child who barely speaks English. All over the United States, general education primary teachers are seeking help in meeting this challenge; many are in a state of anxiety and panic. Sometimes, teachers have no advance warning that they will be teaching a student who speaks English as a second language. In these cases, teachers need to be able to respond quickly. Although there are no fast solutions, specific strategies and resources exist that can help teachers get off to a good start with their new students.

The purpose of this document is to equip primary teachers with basic information regarding the instruction of children who speak English as a second language (ESL). Although a great breadth of information is available on the topic of ESL instruction, the vast responsibilities of an elementary teacher allow for little time to conduct research. This publication was created in order to help mainstream teachers sort through the plethora of information to find what is truly necessary and useful. My hope is that this document will provide a starting point that will direct you to credible sources. I commend you for your dedication—enjoy the challenge, and celebrate the individuality of your students!

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Definition of Terms

Familiarity with some commonly used terms will be helpful to you as you read articles, scan Web sites, and peruse books for the information you need. You will find that many abbreviated terms and phrases exist within the field of teaching second language learners. More advanced documents will often use terms without providing explanations or descriptions. You can use the glossary found in Appendix A as a quick reference guide to help you make the most of what you read.

Standards

In the United States, statewide and nationwide education standards have become essential tools for curriculum design and accountability. Although these standards are meant to be focused on all students, many do not reflect the special needs of ELLs. In 1997, to aid administrators and educators in the process of providing quality education for these students, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) published a set of ESL standards for grades K-12. The standards are organized under three education goals: 1) to use English to communicate in social settings, 2) to use English to achieve academically in all content areas, and 3) to use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways (Short, 2000). The ESL standards can be downloaded from the Internet by accessing the following Web address: www.tesol.org/assoc/k12standards. In addition, TESOL has published a collection of articles, *Integrating the ESL Standards Into Classroom Practice: Grades Pre-K-12* (Smallwood, 2000), that is a very practical resource for any classroom teacher.

Legislation

When working with an English language learner, it is important to have a basic understanding of some key factors affecting ESL education. For example, maintaining awareness of government legislation regarding ESL will ensure that you are meeting the necessary instructional requirements, and also provide a knowledge base concerning students' rights. Appendix B offers brief descriptions of relevant court cases and legislation.

General Guidelines for the Teacher

The first day a new student walks into your classroom can be cause for anxiety if the student is an English language learner. Of course, the student is often more nervous and uncomfortable than anyone. Keep in mind that the most important and immediate goal should be to make these students and their parents feel comfortable and included in the classroom and school environment. This is the essential foundation on which instruction and communication must be built. The following basic strategies will help you and your students achieve a smoother transition. While these strategies are specifically geared for ESL students, they can be of benefit to all students.

Basic Strategies

1. **Find out important information about the student's cultural, linguistic, and family background that will be helpful in serving the child.** A written survey is a good way to start acquiring this information. Parents may prefer written communication at first because it allows them time to process information and ask for help translating if needed. Sample surveys can be found in *Help! They Don't Speak English Starter Kit for Primary Teachers* (Eastern Stream Center on Research and Training [ESCORT], 1998). This helpful workbook may be obtained for free by calling 1-800-451-8058.

2. **Learn essential communication words in your student's first language.** Allow ESL students to speak in their home language if it makes them more comfortable. Learn to recognize and correctly pronounce some key words in the student's language, such as "bathroom," "yes," "no," "hello," "goodbye," "please," "thank you," "help," "teacher," "student," etc. You can find words and phrases in your student's primary language at translation Web sites. *The Translation Place* (http://expage.com/4translation) will lead you to a collection of translation Web sites.

Basic Strategies

3. Use games and activities to help the ESL student interact with the class in a non-threatening manner. Through nonverbal activities, students who do not speak the same language can interact with each other. Puzzles, pattern games, and other visually oriented activities are particularly useful. Emphasize to other students that it is important to value different cultures and languages. If ESL students are comfortable doing so, allow them to share their home languages with the class.

4. Develop a quiet place in the classroom where the ESL student can go to have time alone. As you can imagine, a room full of foreign speakers can be overwhelming for a young child. An ESL student will benefit from a space where he/she can be surrounded by comforting objects or pictures of familiar places or cultural artifacts (Tabors, 1998). Stock this area with children's literature printed in the child's primary language.

5. Use visual and hands-on resources to clarify verbal communication. Provide step-by-step instructions, using pictures, graphs, and videos. Implement behavior plans with a tangible reward system.

6. Stick to a routine as much as possible. Routines will make the student feel more comfortable in the classroom, and will reduce the need for constant explanation of activities. In addition, routine activities will help the child to integrate into the classroom (Tabors, 1998).

7. Invite the student's parents to be involved and present in their child's education. Learning about the student's culture and ethnicity is particularly helpful (Holman, 1997). Assure parents that they are a valued component of their child's educational experience. Maintain regular contact with them, forming a partnership.

8. Use step-by-step instructions with ESL students, and repeat the main ideas often. Repetition reinforces understanding, and gives the ESL student time to process instructions.

9. Allow children to be silent if they choose to do so. Non-English-speaking students may choose to speak in their native language, or they may not want to speak at all. Allow time for the student to adjust to the new environment; do not force participation in verbal communication (Tabors, 1997). Although students may have a significant level of listening comprehension, they may not be comfortable speaking. It is essential to lower these students' affective filters (see Appendix A).

10. If possible, use an assessment tool to evaluate English proficiency. This will give you a clearer understanding of the student's level of English comprehension (see the Assessment section).

Continuing Strategies

As a teacher who undoubtedly faces limited time and resources, one of the most efficient ways for you to spend your time is to compile instructional strategies. If you consult reputable sources, you will find recommended strategies that will be practical and helpful, regardless of your ESL knowledge base. Keep in mind that any strategy recommended for an English Language Learner will also be beneficial to your English-speaking students. In their book *Literature-Based Instruction With English Language Learners* (2002), Hadaway, Vardell, and Young suggest that teachers should keep in mind four basic principles of language acquisition when implementing instructional strategies: 1) focus on the ability to communicate, 2) remember that comprehension precedes production (speaking), 3) understand that production emerges in stages, and 4) work to lower students' affective filters.

You will find innumerable strategies to try in your classroom. Books, articles, and seminars abound that cover every content area and grade level. As a result, the strategies listed here are very general and should serve simply as a starting point for your research. Please take advantage of the resources suggested in this document.

• ***Learning Strategies and Study Skills.*** Use direct instruction when teaching English language learners how to learn. Teach how to identify main ideas and how to record important information. Help students recognize important information by using hand signals/

gestures, writing on the chalkboard, and so on. Provide outlines and study guide materials at least one day prior to the lesson so students can prepare ahead of time, if they choose. By using pictures and minimal wording, this can be done with even very young children. More specific strategies can be found in Judie Haynes's (2001) brief article titled "Study Skills for ELLs."

• ***Language Simplicity, Not Content Simplicity*** (see Haynes & O'Loughlin, 1999). English language learners are just as capable of learning concepts, and it is important that teachers maintain high expectations. Instead of lowering the content level, focus on using lower level language to explain the content. Minimize peripheral information and use sentences that are as simplified as possible. Use simplified questioning strategies as well. Break down complex questions, allow one-word responses, and ask simple yes/no questions. If possible, allow the student to prepare a response in advance, and provide ample wait time.

• ***Total Physical Response (TPR).*** Designed in the 1960s by James Asher, TPR involves teacher modeling in addition to simultaneous vocabulary instruction (Marsh, 1997). For example, while teaching the word "baseball," a teacher might pretend to swing a baseball bat. Students imitate the teacher's speech and actions, establishing associations between language and action that will aid in more rapid vocabulary acquisition. This strategy can be used to teach phrases and commands as well. The language introduced by this strategy is easily comprehensible, and students can begin learning before actually producing their own language (Marsh, 1997). Simply acting out directions, procedures, and other routine behaviors will help English language learners tremendously. Similarly, role-playing and other creative forms of "invented" sign language can be helpful.

• ***Dialogue Journals.*** When using dialogue journals, students write or draw about a subject of their choosing, and the teacher responds with questions or comments. This strategy is helpful to English language learners because it allows a safe environment in which students can test their language skills without fear of failure. Not only does the journal provide essential writing practice, it also allows a private outlet through which students can voice their needs or concerns. While oral interaction can cause anxiety for students, writing provides the time students need to process and comprehend responses. Do not grade or correct the student's writing in dialogue journals. Modeling correct usage and grammar in your responses is more appropriate (Brisk & Harrington, 2000).

• ***Process Writing.*** Any step-by-step approach is helpful, especially when teaching writing. Teach your English language learners the steps of process writing: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Breaking down such a complex task as writing into manageable steps gives students the confidence they need to keep trying, and it also fosters personal relationships with peers as the students read and respond to each other's writing. English language learners thrive on the structure and routine offered by step-by-step approaches (Brisk & Harrington, 2000).

• ***Cooperative Learning.*** One of the biggest complaints among English language learners is that they feel left out or lonely. Fortunately, there are many forms of cooperative learning that you can experiment with in your classroom. One of the main advantages of these strategies is the peer interaction that occurs among the students in your classroom. English language learners get an up-close view of how other students organize information and communicate ideas. In addition, cooperative learning helps students build personal relationships with one another (Schall, 2002). The Jigsaw Approach is one of the most widely recommended cooperative learning strategies for second language learners.

• ***Graphic Organizers.*** Story maps, Venn diagrams, semantic mapping, and other organizational techniques greatly benefit English language learners. Not only is the information consolidated into key points, it is also arranged in a way that fosters comprehension. Such graphic organizers help students, particularly young children, retrieve prior knowledge and develop vocabulary (Brisk & Harrington, 2000). In addition, they help to communicate relationships between words

and ideas that may be difficult to articulate to young children.

• ***Language Experience Approach (LEA).*** The key to this strategy is providing experiences that are meaningful, relevant, and interesting to students. When using LEA, teachers record a story as dictated by the student. This approach is most effective when the student communicates a personal experience from an event such as a party or field trip. The teacher then reads the story to the student, and encourages the student to share the story with others. Many opportunities for instruction stem from these stories, and the student can revise and rewrite as his/her skill level increases. Again, the advantage to using a personal story instead of other written material is that it draws upon the student's personal interest in the experience (ESCORT, 1998).

• ***Visuals! Visuals! Visuals!*** The importance of using visual and hands-on materials cannot be stressed enough. These resources help retain the interest of all students and are extremely valuable. Despite progress, at times an English language learner is bound to become confused and disoriented in a mainstream classroom. Visuals and manipulatives will serve as tools to redirect students back to a satisfactory level of understanding. A visual aid or demonstration helps fill in the gaps left by the student's inability to comprehend all the language spoken in the classroom. Examples of visuals include, but are not limited to, science experiments, math manipulatives, maps, charts, models, pictures, and videos.

• ***Adaptation of Materials.*** Although it is not possible to make adaptations to all the materials you use in your classroom, some changes will need to be made. When adapting materials for an English language learner, consider word order, text length, and the complexity of the vocabulary and verb tense (ESCORT, 1998). It may be necessary to reduce the amount of material the child is required to read. The best way to adapt material is not to rewrite it, but rather to make helpful additions or deletions. Copy the text being read, and write in synonyms, brief explanations, and simplified sentences. At first, it will be helpful to highlight or underline topic sentences and main ideas.

Assessment

Given that assessment is a hot topic in education today, it is no wonder that there is a plethora of new approaches to ESL assessment. Most sources say that the most effective form of assessment is that which is woven into instructional activities. Commonly referred to as authentic assessment, this approach will likely bring more reliable and valid results than any pencil and paper test you create. Assessment strategies for ESL students must allow the student freedom to communicate knowledge despite limited English proficiency. Fair assessment takes place only when the student understands the criteria for success. Communicating regularly with your student's ESL instructor will help you gain valuable insight into the child's development and will serve as a resource for information on effective assessment strategies. The assessment tools discussed in this section are general starting points for designing your own assessment techniques. Use the listed resources to find more information about any of these strategies.

• ***Self-assessment.*** Children, particularly ELL students, are acutely aware of their own level of comprehension and mastery. Self-assessment can be invaluable in determining the next step for instruction, although teachers must be careful to weigh it against more tangible evidence for achievement. Asking a child about his/her strengths and weaknesses is a simple strategy that may save you hours of preparation needed for more complex testing methods. A helpful guide to learning more about ESL self-assessment is O'Malley and Pierce's book *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learners* (1996).

• ***Portfolio Assessment.*** With portfolio assessment, the teacher determines the categories of work to be assessed. The student and teacher collectively choose samples of student work to use as evidence of mastery in each category. The portfolio contents usually are evaluated according to a checklist or rubric that the teacher has previously shared with the student. Suggestions for portfolio implementation can be found in Eckes and Law's book *Assessment and ESL* (1995).

• ***Projects and Demonstrations.*** Projects and demonstrations allow students the opportunity to communicate their knowledge nonverbally, through models, drawings, or graphs (Tannenbaum, 1996). Students must have ample time to complete projects, so that their ability to work quickly, under pressure, is not a factor. A great advantage to this form of assessment is that students are able to choose their own vocabulary. With time to prepare and rehearse, the student's language ability does not affect his or her ability to demonstrate competence in a particular subject area.

It also will be helpful to conduct an oral language proficiency test in order to evaluate English language comprehension. Contact information for popular oral language proficiency tests is listed to the right:

BINL
(Basic Inventory of Natural Languages)
Checkpoint Systems
1558 N. Waterman, Suite C
San Bernardino, CA 92404

IDEA Oral Language Proficiency Test
Ballard and Tighe
580 Atlas St.
Brea, CA 92621
1-800-538-9547

LAS
(Language Assessment Scales)
CTB/McGraw Hill
Del Monte Research Park
2500 Garden Road
Monterey, CA 93940
1-800-538-9547

Family Partnerships

Evidence strongly supports a correlation between academic achievement and parent involvement in a child's education. With this in mind, it is essential that you make every effort to communicate with the family members of your ELL student. Parents may seem hesitant to become involved, especially if they have arrived only recently in the United States or if they have very limited English skills. Parents' insecurity or fear of judgment is understandable and even to be expected. No matter what approach you take to building that important partnership between the school and the family, you must remain sensitive to the unique circumstances of these families. Keep in mind the following recommendations when beginning a relationship with the family of an English language learner:

Strategies With Families

1. Maintain a welcoming, non-judgmental attitude. Parents will not involve themselves in their students' education if they feel unwelcome or negatively judged by school administrators and staff. Don't assume that parents are apathetic if they don't attend scheduled conferences and orientation meetings. Encourage communication and welcome involvement at any level. Many parents must work long hours for low wages in order to support their families. The financial strain on individuals new to the United States can be great, leaving little opportunity for activity outside the workplace. Remember that "economic survival is [often] the primary concern for immigrant families" (Holman, 1997).

2. Determine the preferred form of communication. While the majority of English-speaking parents may prefer face-to-face communication, written notes and information may be the favored alternative for parents with limited English proficiency. Written notes allow the family members time to decode material and prepare responses, and it allows them, if necessary, to seek help with translation. Whenever possible, communication should take place in the parents' home language. Enlist the help of a translator for face-to-face meetings. When using written language, consult online sites that translate English text into the student's home language.

3. Clarify rules and expectations. The standards of American education are vastly different from that of many other cultures. Don't expect parents who are new to the country to know and understand our society's values and expectations concerning education. Rules and procedures regarding attendance, parent responsibilities, and other requirements should be communicated clearly to families. Provide orientation to the programs and services that are offered by your school system (ESCORT, 1998).

4. Personalize your invitations. Fliers, generic newsletters, or general invitations encouraging parental involvement are unlikely to solicit a response from limited English proficient parents. Parents are much more likely to consider personal invitations (Inger, 1992).

5. Make participation as easy as possible. Even parents who speak no English can volunteer to make copies, place notices on or decorate bulletin boards, or assist in other nonverbal activities. Encourage involvement by providing as many resources as you can—providing translators, transportation, and flexible schedules, for example—and by limiting the financial requirements for participation (Inger, 1992). Make as many accommodations as you can. It will be worth it!

6. Demonstrate your appreciation of and respect for the family's culture. Invite parents of students to come to the classroom to share their thoughts about the family's culture. Ask questions about the family's holidays, customs, and values. Being aware of the home culture will communicate your concern for the individual and your sensitivity to the preservation of family traditions and values. "Schools should recognize that newly arrived . . . families come to us from a rich social context. Rather than try to 'acculturate' these families, schools should encourage them to share their culture and background with others" (Holman, 1997).

7. Provide resources for homework assistance. Many parents who have limited English skills feel unqualified to assist their children with homework assignments (TESOL, 2000). If possible, provide resources for additional assistance with schoolwork. It also would be helpful to provide parents with some general information regarding study skills and work habits that are customary in our culture. Taking these steps will remind parents that you're on their side!

Conclusion

As educators, our ultimate responsibility toward an English language learner in our classroom is the same fundamental responsibility we must fulfill for every student we teach. Above all, we must communicate care and concern for the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual well-being of the child. Before learning can take place, we must meet their fundamental need for respect and acceptance. As you endeavor to educate the English language learner in your classroom, remember that his/her challenge to learn is just as great as yours is to teach. Celebrate the challenge, and meet it together!

Celebrating the Individuality of Your Students.

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Appendix A: Glossary

Affective Filter—
This is a mental barrier, created by anxiety, that hinders learning. As anxiety decreases, the filter lowers and learning can take place.

BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills)—
These are the language skills required for an individual to communicate at the most basic level. Such skills are the first to be acquired, and generally take one to three years to develop.

Bilingual Education Program—
This literacy program introduces subject matter in the student's primary language.

BINL (Basic Inventory of Natural Language)—
This common oral language proficiency test is used to determine a student's level of English mastery.

CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency)—
A student at this proficiency level has language skills that allow for academic comprehension and communication. Far more complex than basic interpersonal communication skills, cognitive academic language proficiency generally takes three to 10 years to develop.

ELL—English language learner.

ESL—English as a second language.

FEP—Fluent (or fully) English proficient.

Immersion Program—
A program whereby English language learners receive instruction from a bilingual teacher in English; however, questions may be addressed in the student's primary language. The student also receives language arts instruction in his/her primary language.

LAS (Language Assessment Scales)—
This oral language proficiency test is used to determine a student's level of English mastery.

LEP—Limited English proficient.

Maintenance Program—
This bilingual program provides English language instruction while continuing development of the student's primary language.

NEP—Non-English proficient.

Transitional Program or Early Exit Program—
In this program, which is used to facilitate a more timely transition from the ESL classroom to the English-only classroom, students receive maintenance content area instruction in their primary language, as needed, while receiving English language instruction.

Two-Way Program—
English-speaking students receive instruction in a secondary language, while English language learners receive instruction in English. The goal is for the entire student population to become bilingual and biliterate.

Appendix B: Legislation

• *Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.* This legislation prohibits discrimination on the grounds of race, color, or national origin. "The Title VI regulatory requirements have been interpreted to prohibit denial of equal access to education because of a language minority student's limited proficiency in English" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

• *Bilingual Education Act (1968).* Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), this legislation established a federal policy to provide funding for ESL services, professional development, and research. Rewritten in 1994 as part of the Improving America's Schools Act, the revised legislation changed eligibility requirements for services under Title I to increase ESL students' eligibility to receive services (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

• *May 25 Memorandum (May 25, 1970).* In 1970, what was then known as the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare issued a statement concerning the rights of students in which it clarified that "Where inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national-origin-minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open the instructional program to the students" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

• *Equal Education Opportunity Act (1974).* This legislation prohibits states from denying equal educational opportunities to any student on the basis of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin. The act specifically prohibits states from denying appropriate opportunities for students to overcome language barriers that may affect their access to equal education in an instructional program (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

• *Lau v. Nichols (1974).* Parents of non-English-speaking Chinese students filed a suit against the San Francisco Unified School District, citing the district's failure to provide equal education opportunities. The Supreme Court eventually determined that students receiving identical education were not necessarily receiving equal education as required by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and ruled that the school district must take steps to diminish the educational barriers affecting non-English-speaking Chinese students in the area (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). This could be done by providing English-language instruction.

• *Castaneda v. Pickard (1981).* This case led to the development of a test that would evaluate school programs for ELL students. The test evaluates school programs based on the following criteria: 1) application of sound education theory and instructional strategy, 2) use of necessary resources and personnel, and 3) evaluation of the program by the school and subsequent appropriate modification (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

• *Plyer v. Doe (1982).* In Plyer v. Doe, the U.S. Supreme Court stated that undocumented children and adults have the same right as U.S. citizens to enroll in public school programs; therefore, schools cannot refuse enrollment to any child based on immigration status. School personnel may not make inquiries that could expose a child's status (National Association for Bilingual Education [NABE], 2002).

• *English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act (2002).* Title III, Part A of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, this section reauthorized the Bilingual Education Act of 1968. Changes were made regarding the formula for school funding, parental rights, testing to measure student need for services, and accountability (NABE, 2002).

National organizations concerned with bilingual education are the best resources for updated information regarding current legislation. The Internet may be the best resource available to find timely information about legislative changes. Most organizations update their sites regularly. The following groups are especially helpful.

National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)
1030 15th St. NW, Suite 470, Washington, DC 20005
202-898-1829 • www.nabe.org

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA)
(formerly the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education [NCBE])
2121 K Street NW, Suite 260, Washington, DC 20037
800-321-6223 • www.ncbe.gwu.edu

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Programs for English Language Learners
330 C Street, SW, Washington, DC 20202
800-421-3481 • www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/ELL

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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